

# Togo Reforms Reproductive Health Law

## USAID Improves Maternal and Infant Health Through Policy Change

Emergency cesareans cost several months' salary for most Togolese women. "While families rush to raise funds, many women and their unborn babies die," said Dr. Koffi Akpadza, professor of medicine and leading gynecologist at the central hospital in Lomé. "The law, adopted in 1920, provides no guarantees for reproductive choice or affordable health care."

To increase adoption of improved maternal and child health policies in the region, USAID/West Africa funded Action for West Africa Region Reproductive Health (AWARE-RH) in 2003. From 2004 to 2006, AWARE-RH, POLICY Project and the Forum of African and Arab Parliamentarians on Population and Development (FAAPPD) hosted five regional workshops and AWARE and UNFPA further hosted two national workshops for Togolese lawmakers. Though lawmakers developed a modern reproductive health law tailored to the specific needs of the Togolese people, it remained low on the Parliament's priority list.

To bolster momentum for policy reform, AWARE and the World Health Organization organized a maternal and infant health advocacy workshop for a team of Togo's leading doctors, journalists, economists, and members of government. Using a tool called REDUCE, participants developed a provocative presentation summarizing the poor state of maternal and newborn health and its devastating impacts on the economy. The presentation concludes with a road map for policy reform and a call for action.

In October 2006, Akpadza presented the REDUCE product to Parliament. Lawmakers were shocked to learn



**USAID works with local organizations and other donors to persuade national governments to adopt improved reproductive health care policies and approaches. Since 2004, Benin, Chad, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali, Niger, Senegal, and Togo have passed laws guaranteeing women reproductive rights and access to health care.**

that a Togolese woman dies from complications every eight hours, while 25 more suffer long-term physical disabilities such as incontinence or anemia. Lawmakers called doctors and agency leaders to verify the statistics. Print and television media covered the presentation, awakening awareness across the country.

Within two months Parliament passed the new reproductive health law, laws supporting women's rights and people living with HIV, and a measure against child trafficking. Now, a network of enlightened lawmakers, a team of professionals armed with a moving presentation and a concrete action plan, and local partners, particularly the Center for African Family Studies and the Ministry of Health, are guaranteeing the reproductive health law has far-reaching effects. "We will make sure this law leads to policy and budgetary decisions supporting maternal and child health," said Eloi Amegan of the Center.